

NEWS RELEASE

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Field trip highlights tourism, mining and beauty of Arizona

STATE CAPITOL, PHOENIX (Nov. 26, 2013) – State legislators who recently toured Southeastern Arizona witnessed the natural beauty of the area, visited historical sites and two mines, and learned firsthand about patrolling the international border.

The trip was organized by House Majority Leader David Gowan as an educational tour, and was open to all state legislators. Gowan wanted fellow legislators to see firsthand what the region offers, particularly in terms of tourism and mining, and to understand more clearly how the border in Southeastern Arizona is patrolled.

“The terrain in Southeastern Arizona is amazing,” Gowan said. “And the work that the sheriff and law enforcement agents on the border are doing is exceptional.”

And opportunities to grow the regional economy, particularly in tourism and mining, are available, Gowan added.

Recent data on hospitality-related sales in Cochise County, which is a good proxy for tourism, indicated that the county is approaching the \$950 million annual figure that it averaged consistently from 2005 through 2008, according to Northern Arizona University’s hospitality research center.

Communities like Tombstone have come back strong from the lows reached during the downturn, but there is room for improvement, Gowan said.

The two-day, one-night tour started at 7:45 a.m. Thursday and arrived back at the capital at 11:00 pm the following night. It included legislators, legislative staff, and other government officials, including Secretary of State Ken Bennett and State Mine Inspector Joe Hart. Everyone in the House and Senate was invited and about 20 legislators attended.

The group’s main stops were Kartchner Caverns, the Old Courthouse in Tombstone, the Silver Mine in Tombstone, the Copper Queen Mine in Bisbee, the Brian A. Terry Patrol Station in Naco, the Sierra Vista Police Department, the Cochise County Detention Center, as well as the border itself.

By the end of the first night, the tour group had enjoyed a re-enactment of gunfighters in Tombstone that pitted outlaws against law officers, and of course, the law officers won.

On the second day, the tour group had a more sobering, roundtable discussion with ranchers who are dealing with highly organized outlaws – drug cartels – and other illegal activity on their ranches almost daily.

“The level of frustration is pretty high,” said Rep. Bob Thorpe, R-Flagstaff. “And many of them [ranchers] are interested in moving on and leaving [the area].”

Rep. Debbie Lesko, R-Glendale, who has toured the border before, said that this educational tour introduced her to families who have lived near the border for generations without a problem, but now on a daily basis have drug cartels and human traffickers crossing their land.

“This is one of the main reasons why I wanted the legislature to come on the tour,” Gowan said. “They need to hear and see what happens on this border every day.”

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